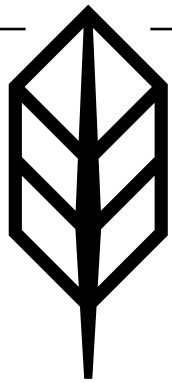


The Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County (PSABC) was formed in 1976, with interest in preservation sparked by observance of the US Bicentennial, and in response to threats to local buildings and sites posed by neglect, insensitive alteration, and large-scale transportation projects. Disinvestment in downtown, plans for the open cut through Beaucatcher Mountain, and a proposal to turn Montford Avenue into a through street connecting to U.S.19-23 spurred formation of the volunteer

group, which quickly incorporated and initiated work as a community non-profit. The Society advocated to City Council and County Commission to establish a joint city-county local landmark and historic district commission, to designate Montford as a local historic district, and to provide matching funds for local survey of historic buildings and sites. These actions made possible the historic designation of numerous sites and districts, and contributed to downtown revitalization and preservation of historic places county-wide.



Pebbledash

PRESERVATION
SOCIETY OF
ASHEVILLE
AND BUNCOMBE CO.

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF ASHEVILLE AND BUNCOMBE COUNTY

Fall 2022

Walton Pool Landmarked

BY JOSI WARD

On Tuesday, October 25, City Council voted to designate Walton Street Park and Pool as a City of Asheville Local Landmark. This vote is significant, and a long time coming. The pool has been inconsistently open since 2017, and closed permanently to the public in 2021. The city has shifted resources and focus to the Dr. Wesley Grant Sr. Center—a wonderful new neighborhood amenity, to be sure—yet has seemed to be abandoning the historic pool and its park that means so much to so many Asheville residents. When PSABC noticed that Asheville Parks and Recreation was not responding to organized and urgent pleas to save Walton Street Pool, we decided to pursue landmark status with or without city support.

Walton Street Park (originally named Riverview Park) was established with Works Progress Administration funds in 1938 and the pool was completed in 1947. The park was founded as a recreational space for the city's Black population during the years of Jim Crow segregation. Tucked at the southern end of the historically African American neighborhood known as Southside, and surrounded on all other sides by railroad tracks and undeveloped (at the time) woods, the 4.37-acre park is a quintessential segregated city park. It was conveniently located for those who lived in Southside, but geographically isolated from the main thoroughfares of the city and from established white neighborhoods (who protested an earlier site adjacent to Montford). From the year of its opening until the end of segregation in Asheville, Walton Street Park and Pool was the sole municipal park and swimming area available to the Black population in Asheville.

City Council's vote marks the first time in decades that the city has affirmed the importance of the park to the city. The history of the park is one of perpetually inadequate

and chronically overcrowded Mountain Street Pool, the first municipal pool for Asheville's African American population. The city did not construct a new pool until 1947. It was 1,000 square feet smaller than the Mountain Street Pool. Six years later, the park was still missing basic amenities such as a water fountain, and street lights. City Manager Weir promised to allocate \$25,000 in the 1953-4 city budget for Walton Street Park. The budget passed by City Council included only \$5,000.



Following extensive vandalization in 1972 (shattered windows, removed pipes, sledgehammered toilets and lights), repairs were so slow that the 1974 Model Cities Task Force called the park a danger to children in the area, and recommended that the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board not open the pool for the summer unless improvements were made. The pattern of deprioritizing and underfunding the park is long-standing.

In spite of the city's neglect, the history of the park is also one of vocal and passionate appreciation from those who grew up going to the park, who learned to swim there, who appreciated the place as the one sanctioned meeting ground for all of Black Asheville. At least since 2010, current and former residents of

Southside have been urgently requesting that the city reinvest in the park and the pool. In 2010, *The Urban News* published a plea to preserve the pool: "The only people

who will be emotionally disheartened and affected by the destruction of Walton Pool is the black community, a community that continues to be underrepresented, silenced, and squeezed out of what we consider to be our history." In 2015, following continued rumors that the city was planning to close the pool, more than 800 Southside residents signed a public petition to Save Walton Street Pool. This year, the city released another survey asking Asheville residents whether the Walton Street Pool should be

step in rehabilitating a long-overlooked public space. The next step needs to be a commitment to restoring it to a useful and vibrant public amenity. The City has earmarked \$500,000 to improve amenities at the park, but has been very clear that none of those funds will be used to rehabilitate the pool. The improvement of other park facilities and recreational spaces is much-needed and long-overdue, and this funding promises to improve the park to an extent that has never happened in its history. However, the campaign to re-open the pool is far from over. At a recent meeting of the African American Heritage Commission, Chair Aaron Griffin voiced his opinion that landmarking the park was not enough; he wants to see the pool reopened as well. He was passionate and clear: "This is our chance to really do something great. We can do this one right, you know. We dropped the ball with a lot of other historical sites, with Stephens Lee, with Burton Street. We dropped the ball. We cannot afford to drop the ball with this one. It's right here for us."

We at PSABC will continue advocating for the park and the pool. Our next immediate step is seeking to have Walton Street Park and Pool listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a designation that may open doors to funds and grants focused on the preservation of African American heritage sites. ☘

Josi Ward is Board President of PSABC. She recently authored the *Landmark Designation Report and National Register of Historic Places application for Walton Street Park and Pool*.

"The only people who will be emotionally disheartened and affected by the destruction of Walton Pool is the black community, a community that continues to be underrepresented, silenced, and squeezed out of what we consider to be our history."

The Urban News (2010)

amenities and deferred maintenance. When the park was first established in 1938, it was with a promise that it would house a pool. The new pool would replace the recently closed

designated historic. As of this week, 82% of respondents have said yes. We are proud that City Council heeded these calls.

This landmark designation is not a end-goal, but rather, an important first



Charlotte Street Demolition: What a Waste

The first of the homes along the 100 block of Charlotte Street was demolished in mid-October and the rest are surely soon to follow. This comes months after the demolition of the Richard Sharp Smith designed home at 176 E Chestnut and four homes on Baird Street. In all, we expect to see 13 homes demolished by the Killian family and developers RCG on this one block.

Even as trucks haul thousands of tons of waste from these homes to our landfill, the City of Asheville is seeking applicants to complete an \$85,000 study on missing middle housing. Middle housing was extremely common before 1940 and refers to house scaled buildings with multiple units in walkable neighborhoods... exactly what is being demolished along Charlotte Street. Preservation of these homes would have not only saved the history and charm of this neighborhood but would have also addressed affordable housing and sustainability concerns widely held by the community.

Over and over again, from people all over Asheville, we have heard the same simple thought about these homes and it really does sum it up perfectly. What a waste!

Here is what StrongTowns.org had to say about missing middle housing:

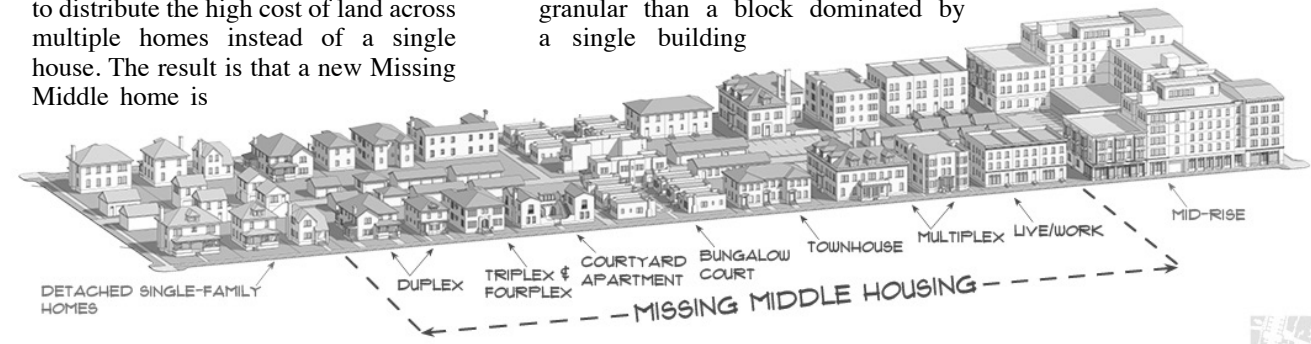
- Missing Middle development fits readily into more locations, where there might not be the market for a large apartment complex (or a large enough piece of land might not be available). This can address the trickle-or-fire-hose problem, in which almost all of the development going on in our cities is concentrated in a small minority of neighborhoods.
- Missing Middle housing is cheaper to build than larger and taller buildings, which require different construction techniques and materials. But the Missing Middle still makes it possible to distribute the high cost of land across multiple homes instead of a single house. The result is that a new Missing Middle home is

often the least expensive kind of home you can build, and immensely valuable in cities with an affordability crisis.

- Missing middle development can be phenomenally financially productive for cities; the combination of more people paying taxes and low infrastructure needs is a fiscal winner.
- Missing middle development is a business that a mom-and-pop landlord can get a start in. In fact, it's how most small-scale developers get their start. When we only build large buildings, only large corporations can have an ownership stake in our cities.
- A block full of missing middle buildings makes for better urban design. It's more granular than a block dominated by a single building

with a single owner, and likely more resilient because there is not a single point of failure if things go wrong.

- A neighborhood full of missing middle buildings hits a sweet spot for many people in which there are enough people around to foster a walkable environment, but still maintain a comfortable and appealing small-town feel. It's the good old. ☘



From the Executive Director



Early this year, PSABC purchased Cappadocia Church and a 1910 house in the East End neighborhood. Both had been slated for demolition before a developer agreed to sell them to us. Thanks to hundreds of hours of work by volunteers, we have managed to clean the properties out, beat back vegetation and prepare for rehabilitation. We have also worked to identify community partners that will help us not only preserve these important places, but use them to create affordable housing. It has been and will most likely continue to be a slow and difficult process.

Adaptive reuse isn't always easy but the creativity born out of limitations and challenges of these projects can lead to exciting things. As you will read on page 3, adaptive reuse is by far the most sustainable choice.

We count on your donations to make this work and everything we do throughout the year possible. There are so many different ways to support us! Our Individual Memberships range from \$35 to \$2500 and our Business Memberships range from \$250 to \$1000. Already a member? Consider making an additional donation today.

Thank you for everything!

Sincerely,

Jessie Landl
Executive Director



Our Mission
To conserve Asheville and Buncombe County's heritage and sense of place through preservation and promotion of the region's historic resources.

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- VICE PRESIDENT**
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Heath Towson
Cynthia Watson
- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**
Jessie Landl
- FINANCE & OPERATIONS**
Jamie Moody

FALL 2022 PRESERVATION GRANTS

In response to our most competitive round of grant applications to date, our Board of Directors voted to extend our yearly funding from \$20,000 to \$30,000! In this, our first round of funding this fiscal year, we are granting \$20,000 to deserving preservation projects in our community.

\$1500 matching grant to the Norwood Park Neighborhood Association

The Norwood Park neighborhood is home to one of our City's secret sidewalks. The 100 plus year old walkway spans more than 300 feet connecting the residents of Norwood Park to the goods and services of Merrimon Avenue. This grant will fund the research and documentation of the history of this walkway in hopes of ensuring its preservation in the neighborhood for another 100 years.

\$2500 for Asheville: A Graphic Novel History

Author Matthew K. Manning and artist Jarrett Rutland are creating this 100-page graphic novel retelling of Asheville's storied history in hopes that it will resonate not just with longtime fans of our city, but also with a younger audience. The story will lead the reader through history from prehistoric times to today, letting them see the city form first-hand.

\$4000 to the Stumptown Neighborhood Association

This grant will fund video interviews for story gathering and sharing in order to celebrate, honor and preserve the rich history of this neighborhood.

From the application: *Stumptown was a vibrant, closely knit Black neighborhood located "in the hollow under the brow of the hill" between what is now Riverside Cemetery, Pearson Drive, and Courtland Avenue. It had active churches, stores, and community cohesion. Black residents today still call their neighborhood Stumptown, though urban renewal and gentrification have thoroughly eroded what was a once a thriving Black community.*

Research shows that Stumptown is older than the adjacent Montford neighborhood – it developed around a piece of property on Pearson Drive given to Tempie Avery by her former enslaver Nicholas Woodfin in 1868. As Black history is not as present in written historical records, we do not have an exact date of the establishment of Stumptown, though most accounts place its inception around 1880.

The Stumptown neighborhood was redlined in the late 1930s, but remained a strong community through the 1960s, despite systemic neglect which made the area vulnerable to displacement. The majority of homes and lots in the neighborhood were taken by the City of Asheville during urban renewal in the 1970s for the Montford Recreation Complex. With the naming of the complex after Montford and the subsequent gentrification of the area, the story of Stumptown has been mostly hidden.

There has been some documentation of stories from Stumptown residents, but it is not easily accessible to the general public. While the early history of the neighborhood was acknowledged by

the renaming of the community center to the Tempie Avery Center; there is no signage acknowledging the existence of the Stumptown neighborhood or the contributions of its residents.

The Stumptown Neighborhood Association wants to address this erasure and build awareness of this history and culture through story gathering/sharing and signage.

\$2000 to Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center

This grant is for the installation of protective barriers to protect the recently completed conservation of two frescos painted in the summer of 1944 by luminary of the Mexican Mural Renaissance, Jean Charlot.

\$5000 to La Esperanza Real Estate Cooperative

This funding will support the extensive repairs and upgrades needed at 528 Emma Road.

From the application: *The La Esperanza ("The Hope" in English) building, which was built in 1914, is located in the center of the Emma community. According to Andrea Clarke via her family oral histories, it was constructed by the renowned Black mason James Vester Miller and his crew.*

La Esperanza is cooperatively owned by over 30 families in the community; many of whom also invested significant time and labor to fix up the building after it was purchased. Thanks to PODER Emma's community development efforts which made this possible, these community members, including Latinx immigrants, who might not otherwise have access to owning real estate are able to build community wealth through La Esperanza.

The building houses Colaborativa La Milpa, a collective of Latinx-led grassroots groups working to uplift and protect the community. The members of the collective are Compañeros Inmigrantes de las Montañas en Acción (CIMA), Raíces Emma - Erwin, PODER Emma, and Ma hñäkihu: Indigenous Language Preservation Project.

La Esperanza also houses worker-owned cooperatives Power in Number Bookkeeping, Cenzontle Language Justice Cooperative, Quetzal Community Real Estate, and Chispas.

Serving as a community hub, community members visit La Esperanza to access supportive services provided by La Milpa's organizations and the co-ops. A large community room on the first floor of La Esperanza is used for youth programs, classes, meetings, and events.

\$5000 to Hopkins Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church

This funding is for a National Register of Historic Places nomination and a building assessment.

In addition to being built by noted brick mason, James Vester Miller, and designed by architect Richard Sharp Smith, this church has an incredible history which you can read at hopkinschapelamezion.org.



NORWOOD PARK



HOPKINS CHAPEL A.M.E. ZION CHURCH



LA ESPERANZA



GRANT PROGRAM

More Information About Our Preservation Grant Program

We look forward to helping with emergency stabilization projects and restorations of important places, to helping neighborhoods receive designations such as recognition on the National Register of Historic Places and to encouraging and supporting new and unique education and research opportunities. We want to be surprised and humbled by the projects our community asks us to support!

As our city faces the inevitable challenges of growth, PSABC's voice and reach must expand. The important addition of this Preservation Grant Program comes in response to the needs of our community.

In 2023, we will be offering up to \$30,000 in grants (individual grants will be from \$500 – \$5000) to the public in three categories:

- 1. Bricks-And-Mortar**
Rehabilitation, restoration and repair of structures that are 50 years of age or older.
- 2. Public Education**
Development of educational materials and programs that advance knowledge of our shared history.
- 3. Planning, Survey and Designation**
Planning and design for building rehabilitation and restoration projects, historic resource surveys and local or national designations.

Check out PSABC.org to see past grant recipients and to learn about the upcoming Spring submission deadline.

FAIN'S BASEMENT

SALE of

Thousands of Pieces

TOWEL

REMNANTS

Thursday Only!

Size					
14x21—10c ea.	—	—	—	12 for \$1.00	
20x24—15c ea.	—	—	—	8 for \$1.00	
22x36—19c ea.	—	—	—	7 for \$1.00	

For The Kitchen

12x18—10c ea.	—	—	—	14 for \$1.00	
17x19—15c ea.	—	—	—	8 for \$1.00	
12x19—5c ea.	—	—	—	22 for \$1.00	

Average Sizes, some more, some less

6-Pc. Juice Sets

4 Glasses — 1 Pitcher
1 Tray

\$1.00

Set

Thursday Only!

ELECTRIC IRON

\$2.98

Thursday Only!

Sandwich Bar SPECIAL

Big Thick MILKSHAKE

15c

Basement

FAIN'S THRIFT STORE

15 Biltmore Ave.

ADAPTIVE REUSE IS SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

As Asheville struggles with an affordable housing crisis, and as a city that values our history, the environment and creativity, adaptive reuse of our existing building stock should be our first priority.

All around the city we have vacant space. Space that used to be schools, churches, offices or retail, but now sits unused. We call on owners, architects and developers to find new and creative ways to put these spaces to use and on our local government and elected officials to encourage this kind of development.

Earlier this year, Common Edge, “a nonprofit organization dedicated to reconnecting architecture and design with the public that it’s meant to serve”, interviewed architect Bob Berkebile.

We ought to find every way possible to create longer use of what we’ve already built and adaptively reuse the built environment that we own, rather than build a new one, because right now we can’t afford the carbon.

Berkebile is the founding chairman of the American Institute of Architects’ National Committee on the Environment and was instrumental in the formation of the US Green Building Council and its LEED rating system. While we are not suggested a halt to all new development, Berkebile’s remarks from the interview reinforce our belief that adaptive reuse is the most sustainable way for our city to continue to grow:

If you could rework LEED for today, what changes would you make?

Number 1: There has to be an enormous, critical reason to build a new building in the next five to 10 years. We ought to find every way possible to create longer use of what we’ve already built and adaptively reuse the built environment

that we own, rather than build a new one, because right now we can’t afford the carbon. Even if a new project is a Living Building and won’t be producing operational carbon, it’s still going to take carbon to construct the building, and the embodied carbon right now is too great a price to pay.

What do we do about all of the housing that is desperately needed? What do we do without new buildings?

It’s a great question. If you look at our cities, you’ll find one hell of a lot of empty or underutilized retail space, shopping centers, hotels, and, increasingly, office buildings. In my view, those are great places to build a new kind of community, with a lot of housing.

That’s the first act. Now, I’m not saying you can never build a new building, because there will be times when, for a variety of reasons, it’s so critical that, for example, a new hospital gets built, in that location, when there’s nothing around that would create the appropriate shell for that use. But if you do that, then you have to find a way for it to operate as a Living Building, number 1. And number 2, you have to offset all of that carbon that you invested in constructing the building. If we care about our children and their children having a planet to live on comfortably, then that has to be a move we take in the immediate future.

The full interview can be read at commonedge.org.

Johnny Baxter Award Recipients

In 2019, PSABC partnered with the UNCA History Department to offer an annual award to a student or students furthering the study of African American contributions in Asheville and Buncombe County. This award was developed in honor of Johnny Baxter, an Asheville native, preservationist, historian and founding Board member of PSABC. Mr. Baxter led the efforts to have the YMI Cultural Center listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

This past summer we recognized two students with this award:

Rebecca Kelley is a junior history major who plans to pursue a career in museums or historic preservation. In addition to her interest in local, military, and maritime history, Rebecca also enjoys working with her two horses, gardening, reading and writing novels, knitting, and generally being outdoors.

Tori Rigsby is a native of Buncombe County who also wishes to work in public history. In addition to his love of history, he describes himself as an avid climber, dog dad, plant enthusiast, and fly fisherman.

Tori and Rebecca will take the lead on a project researching the history of Asheville and Buncombe County’s African American cemeteries. They have already helped to conduct headstone surveys in the Shiloh A.M.E. Zion and South Asheville Cemeteries, and they are researching individuals interred in these cemeteries to gather more information about the contributions of African Americans to this area’s economy and society. Their work will lay a foundation for a larger initiative that will help to tell a more inclusive story of Asheville’s history.

Remembering Marge Turcot

Earlier this year, Marge Turcot passed away on June 16, 2022, at the age of 88. Marge was a longtime friend of PSABC and we thought it would be fitting to share this piece written about her in 1996 when she won a preservation award from the Historic Resources Commission. We are so grateful for everything Marge did for Asheville and Buncombe County and she will surely be missed.

Marge Turcot loves old buildings. She loves saving them from destruction. And she loves having fun while she’s doing it. She’s been doing it now, non-stop, for over twenty years.

Marge, a native of White Plains, New York, came to Asheville in 1969, and bought a big old house that needed a lot of work. The Reed House sits atop Reed Hill above Biltmore Village. It was built in 1892 for Samuel Reed. By the early seventies, it was in a pretty sad state of disrepair. It was historic, though, and beautiful, and had room for her three children and assorted stray lambs. Not to mention a wrap-around porch, and octagonal tower with a bell roof and a staircase too gorgeous for words. Working full-time in her profession of nursing, at which she has excelled, Marge was slowly but steadily able to turn the house into the comfortable gracious bed and breakfast and home it is today.

For some strange reason, Marge missed the first meeting of the Preservation Society, held at the Grove Park real estate office on Charlotte Street in June of 1976. But she was there for the second, in the basement of St. Lawrence Catholic Church. She remembers

the three hours it took to choose a name. She’s been there ever since. Marge has served the Society as President, Vice President, Secretary, Board Member, Committee Chair, and active member during each and every one of the last twenty years. She’s never “burnt out” and left the work to others. She’s never run off to law school, or New York, or Colorado, or Raleigh, or France, as some former officers have done. She has stayed the course.

She served the society through the good and the bad, the easy and the hard. Her presidency was from 1984 to 1986, during which time Richmond Hill was (at great expense) moved, mortgaged, stabilized and marketed. It remains the largest house ever moved in the state of North Carolina. The financial and logistical planning involved was considerable.

Most recently, she chaired the Cotton Mill committee, where her longtime involvement with Riverlink aided the society’s liaison with Riverlink.

Marge didn’t confine herself to the “sitting down at a table” kind of preservation. No chore was too grubby, no batch of phone-calling too tiresome. Marge and her famed blue pickup truck and the extra hands and strong backs her family has provided have been at the vast majority of house-cleanings and building stabilizations the society has undertaken.

Many are the house tours she was a docent at, many are the tickets she has taken at auctions, balls, fashion shows, salvage sales and Heritage Week luncheons.

Marge had always recognized the importance of salvage of historic building

ASK A PRESERVATIONIST

Q. What is vernacular architecture?

A. When you Google vernacular architecture, you find yourself reading more about what it’s not than what it is. It’s not academic. It’s not high style. It’s not designed by a professional. It’s not monumental. But even with all that it’s not, it can be really great.

When I hear the term vernacular, I’ve taken to replacing it in my mind with the word local. It’s built from local materials, by local builders and addresses local needs like environmental factors. For these reasons, it tends to be a sustainable way to build and a meaningful example of local culture. Some examples in Buncombe County would be log structures and field stone chimneys.

A house that came up a few times in my search for vernacular architecture in Buncombe County is the Carter-Swain house near Barnardsville which was described in the National Register nomination as embodying “several distinctive characteristics of western North Carolina vernacular architecture, including its two tiered porch and internal log section”. The book Cabins and Castles also describes the mantels in the house as “simple, heavy and vernacular with diamond and floral appliques”.

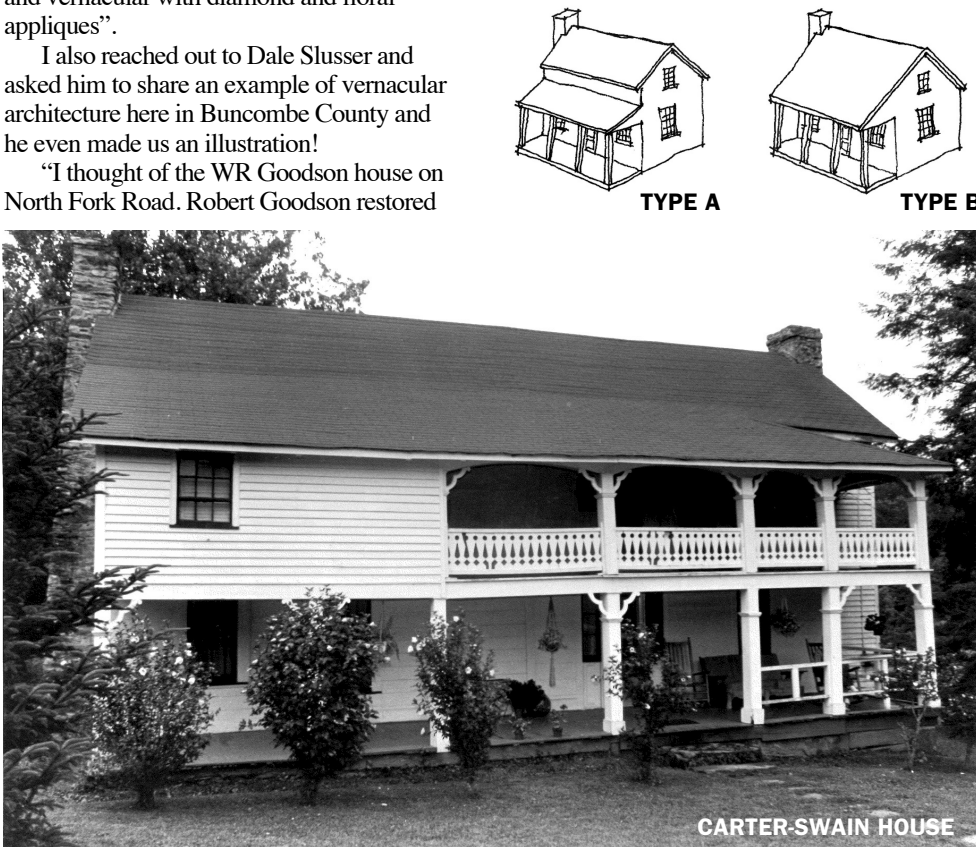
I also reached out to Dale Slusser and asked him to share an example of vernacular architecture here in Buncombe County and he even made us an illustration!

“I thought of the WR Goodson house on North Fork Road. Robert Goodson restored it and uses it for family gatherings. It was built by WR Goodson in the late 1800s. The family story is that his fiancé was still in school, and Goodson started building the house when they were engaged, and so she would be sitting in the school not far away listening to the hammering as her soon-to-be husband was building a house for them!”

Type A- It has a typical vernacular configuration for WNC, which is a simple 1-1/2 story, like a Cape Cod house except that instead of the roof rafters sitting on top of the first floor walls, in WNC vernacular, the roof rafters sat on a half wall on the second story. Often they would extend the roof out in the front for a porch, or like in the Goodson house they would run the front porch roof up to the second floor half wall. This developed from the earlier log house where they would put in a loft floor and then run a few more logs on top before they set the roof rafters.

Type B- Another example is the Marcus Maloney Jones house, which still sits out at Camp Rockmont. It has the same configuration as original Goodson house, except that it was log, and in that example they built the front roof out over a front porch.”

Vernacular isn’t easy to define, but hopefully we have given you a starting point for considering local design.



Oral History Backpack Loan Program from the Buncombe County Public Libraries

History doesn’t just live in public records, letters, maps, or photographs. Many people aren’t well-represented in documented history, especially those that have been historically excluded from power or property.

Oral histories give people the opportunity to tell their stories in their own words and allow their voices to endure through times. Oral histories fill in the gaps of the historical record, and deepen our comprehension of the past and present by showing us how lives are experienced on an individual level.

You can now check out an oral history backpack from Buncombe County Public Libraries! Call your local library or 828-250-4740 to request a backpack. You will receive a phone call when the backpack is ready to be picked up. There is no cost to borrow a backpack!

Your oral history backpack will include everything you need (and more) to record a successful oral history interview, and (if you choose) to donate the recording to a collection where it can be made available to the public and preserved for future generations.



materials. What I remember especially are the tiles.

When I asked Marge what was the most fun she’d had with the society, she answered without hesitation, “Oh, the balls.” “Going to them or getting ready for them?” “The whole thing. I even liked taking the chairs back.” Only those of you who remember the years of arising at dawn on Sunday morning after having danced the night away in the Manor, the Grove Arcade, the S & W Cafeteria, the Courthouse, the old Ivey’s building (now the Haywood Park Hotel), Richmond Hill and the Chesterfield Mill can tell you what that means.

She worked on each of the society’s projects, glazing lots and lots of windows at the Gudger House, Putting yellow-painted plywood over the windows of the Coleman House, doing nearly everything at Richmond Hill, cleaning out the Manor, everything for the Cotton Mill, right up to setting up work days for the society’s latest acquisition, the Smith House on E. Chestnut Street.

Marge has also been a dedicated and effective advocate for historic preservation, appearing numerous times before City Council.

I was able to talk to a number of folks who’ve worked with Marge over the years, and none of what I’ve just said was the first thing they mentioned. Marge’s most valuable contribution to historic preservation is her positive attitude, and the pleasure it is to work with her. It is not just that we have heard no negative words from her, but that she was continuously able to provide positive words, encouragement and enthusiasm. She was the first to bring brownies to meetings and functions. She stitched up Riverlink’s mascot, the “French Broad.” No group has done more for preservation than the Preservation Society, and no one has done more for the Preservation Society than Marge. It is very fitting that she get this wonderful award, and it is with great pleasure that the Historic Resources Commission of Asheville and Buncombe County hereby presents the Foster A. Sondley bowl for 1996 to Marge Turcot.

“The Thomas Wolfe Cabin” and The Log Cabin Revival

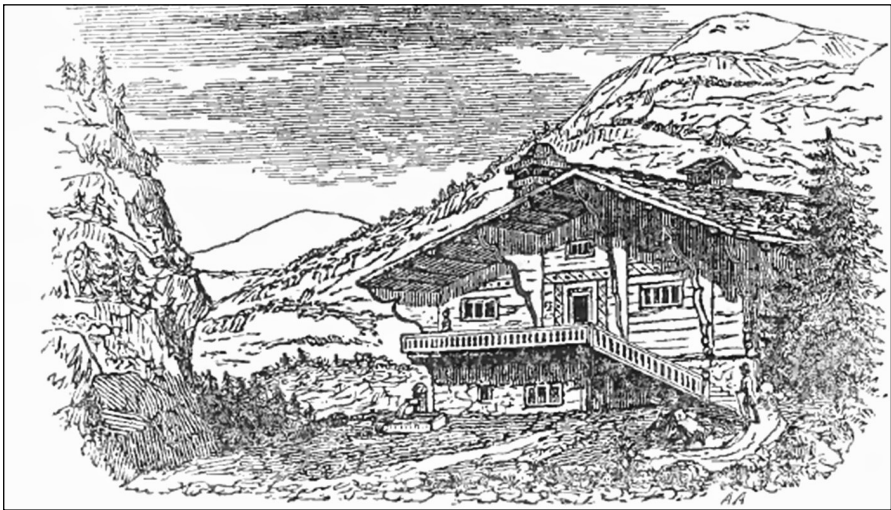
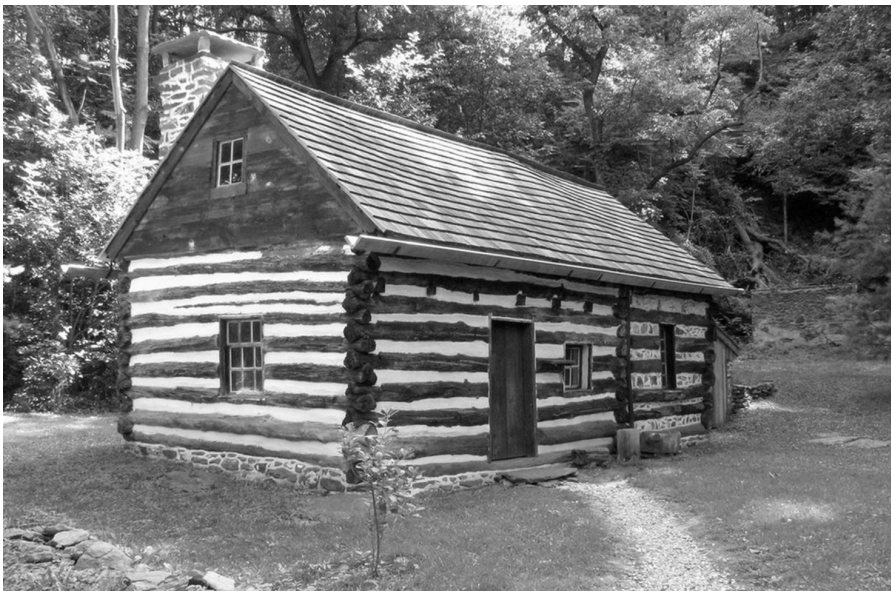


Written By
Architectural Historian
Dale W. Slusser

A small unassuming log cabin, which sits on a bluff just above the John B. Lewis soccer fields in East Asheville, and which is now sadly in need of restoration, is famously known as “The Thomas Wolfe Cabin”, although Thomas Wolfe never owned it, and only lodged there for a few months during the summer of 1937. Architecturally, the cabin represents and is a product of the enduring legacy of the “log cabin”, which has through a series of resurgence and revivals remained as both an iconic ymbol of America’s history, as well as a viable means of shelter. How did this unassuming log cabin, called “The Thomas Wolfe Cabin”, come to be, and what is its architectural history? And why has the cabin become so famous and taken on the moniker “The Thomas Wolfe cabin”?



Whitson Cabin-c. 1930- Image # W263-5, Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC.



Top: The “Lower Swedish Cabin” in Drexell Hill, Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, which was built sometime between the 1630s and the 1650s, is thought to be the oldest surviving log cabin in the United States.

Middle: This sketch of a Swiss Chalet is from A. J. Downing’s 1841 publication of *A Treatise in the Practice of Landscape Gardening*. Adapted to North America.

Bottom: This photo taken on July 29, 1937, in front of the Whitson cabin, shows Thomas Wolfe with Judge Phillip C. Cocke and a lady friend. The photo also clearly shows the sleeping porch (on the left) with its ribbon windows, and it even shows the interior curtains. years.

The building of the Thomas Wolfe Cabin (yes, I have conceded to using its moniker) is rooted in the early 1900’s “rustic revival” architectural movement, which in the 1920’s and 1930’s also morphed into the “Log Cabin Revival” movement, which in turn was proliferated by the rise in “tourists camps” and “tourists courts” (the precursors to the modern motel). But of course, a “revival-style”, denotes a reoccurrence of an earlier architectural style. Let’s begin by first taking a brief look at the origins of the log cabin in America and Western North Carolina, and then we’ll move into its various reoccurrences in America’s architectural history.

Historians have long debated the origins of log cabins in America, however modern-day consensus points to the log cabin being first brought to the new world by settlers from Sweden, where it was a traditional housing style. “Many [Swedes] settled on the Delaware and around Maryland’s tidewater region,” writes, historian Judith Flanders, “and it is here that the first contemporary references to houses built of logs appear: a court record in 1662 mentions a “logged haws”, while in 1679, a Dutchman recorded a house in what is now New Jersey, built “according to the Swedish mode”.¹ A surviving example of an early Swedish log cabin is the “Lower Swedish Cabin” in Drexell Hill, Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, which was built sometime between the 1630s and the 1650s, “and still stands, relatively unaltered, from when it was constructed hundreds of years ago.”² As new settlers arrived, log construction technology moved with those settlers down the Great Wagon Road from Pennsylvania and into the Shenandoah Valley and into the North Carolina Piedmont and Appalachian Mountains. The ingenuity of the log cabin was that the construction was extremely simple and required no more than an axe and maybe a saw. The pioneers could simply stack the logs one upon the other, and they weren’t restrained by the need for nails or spikes to keep the structure together. Plus, the log cabins could be constructed by one person in a couple of weeks.³ “The availability of timber, the simple tools required for construction, and the possibility of in-

dividual construction”⁴ caused log-cabin construction to be the number one choice of construction utilized by pioneers moving into Western North Carolina after the Revolutionary War. Even Asheville’s first courthouse, built in 1793, was said to have been a log building!⁵

In 1840, when log cabin building in the U. S. and in Western North Carolina, was mostly being replaced by timber framed houses, politics began to shape symbolic meaning into the humble log cabin in America. In the 1840 presidential election, “William Henry Harrison’s opponents tried to downplay Harrison’s background by making fun of the fact that Harrison was born and raised in a log cabin. Instead of trying to deny his humble beginnings, Harrison shrewdly embraced it and used it to pull on the heartstrings of the common people who also lived in log cabins at that time. This resulted in Harrison’s election to Presidency

by a landslide and the recognition of the log cabin as an American expression of self-sufficiency, tenacity, independence, and social mobility.⁶

Tapping into the 1840’s growing admiration of the log cabin as a symbol of America as the “New Republic” was the rise of the Romantic Era architecture promoted by the writings, Andrew Jackson Downing. Andrew Jackson Downing, a New York landscape designer best known for his book *A Treatise in the Practice of Landscape Gardening*, Adapted to North America, published in 1841, played a substantial role in Romanticized architecture around the Hudson Valley in upstate New York.⁷ An influential writer, Downing suggested that country residents abandon “the prevalent Greek Revival architecture in favor of a style more suited to the country.” Downing’s focus was on a romanticized view of rural landscapes and rural architecture, by creating naturalistic landscapes and buildings using the eye of an artist. On the heels of the success of his 1841 book, the following year, Downing published *Cottage Residences*, a series of designs for houses of modest size, to appeal to the “industrious and intelligent mechanics and workingmen, the bone and sinew of the land.”⁸ Downing further published, *The*



Architecture of Country Houses in 1850, just two years before his untimely death in 1852. A. J. Downing’s ideas and designs became known as the “Picturesque-style”, which was “characterized by a preoccupation with the pictorial values of architecture and landscape in combination with each other”.⁹ Downing’s architectural ideas of ornamented cottages, villas, country and farmhouses, flowered into the Eastlake/Stick-style of the 1870’s and finally into the highly ornamented Queen-Anne styles of the late Victorian era.

More pertinent to our topic of log cabins, is that Downing’s writings also inspired William Durant, who is considered the progenitor of the “Adirondack-Style”, also known as “The Great Camp-Style” of architecture. In 1876, William Durant’s father, Dr. Thomas Clark Durant, railroad builder, purchased large tracts of the Adirondacks in upstate New York, intent on opening and developing the Adirondacks as a summer resort. He hoped this effort would be facilitated by his rail line, the Adirondack Railway Company. Following local building styles, Dr. Durant’s earliest camp dwellings were log cabins constructed of bark-clad logs with wide, overhanging eaves. But it was Dr. Durant’s son, William West Durant (1850-1934), who formulated the hallmarks of Adirondack rustic architecture, when between 1876-77, William began to transform his father’s camp, Camp Pine Knot at Raquette Lake, into an artistic rustic retreat for wealthy vacationers. At Camp Pine Knot, William Durant combined the indigenous Adirondack log cabin and lumber camp construction; with the Picturesque ideas of “naturalistic motifs for country homes placed in wild settings”¹⁰ and the Swiss chalet from Downing’s writings. Durant’s designs for Camp Pine Knot were the first of his “Great Camps” and would eventually become the model for “Adirondack-style Rustic Architecture”.

The Adirondack-Style architecture was characterized by the use of natural building materials like wood and stone, which could be found easily. And because the Great Camps were built in the wilderness far from sawmills and manufacturing facilities, their builders, like the pioneers of times past, most often utilized log construction that could be achieved with the use of hand tools. In fact, log construction, albeit on steroids, became the hallmark of the Adirondack-style. This is ironic, as although A. J. Downing often featured sketches of “rustic-style” benches, chairs, and arbors, all made of logs, he actually disdained log houses, often calling them “log huts”. In fact, in his preface to his publication of *The Architecture of Country Houses* he wrote, “So long as men are forced to dwell in log

huts, and follow a hunter’s life, we must not be surprised at lynch law and the use of the bowie knife.”¹¹ Despite Downing’s disparaging attitude towards log houses, Durant applied Downing’s principles and elevated the “log hut” to an artistic, tasteful, and sought-after mode of habitation-that is, a nice place to live!

The Adirondack-style became associated with the “Great Camps” and other “Health Resorts” of the late Victorian-era, where wealthy and middle-class people could escape to the “wilderness” for rest, relaxation, respite, and/or resort. In the 1870’s, just as the Great Camps were beginning, men like Dr. J. F. E. Hardy began an active campaign to promote Asheville as a “Health Resort”, where those with ailments (especially of the lungs) could come and be healed by the “healthful” climate and fresh mountain air. The arrival of the railroad in 1880 propelled the campaign to make Asheville a premiere health resort and tourist destination. Not surprisingly, with its shared clientele and similar rugged mountain “wilderness”, the Adirondack Rustic style of architecture began to be proliferated in Asheville and Western North Carolina, by the late 1890’s. Perhaps the earliest known example of the Adirondack style, in Asheville, was Susan Chester Lyman’s 1894 “Log-cabin Settlement House”, designed by architect Richard Sharp Smith, who had just recently been sent to Asheville by his employer, Richard Morris Hunt to supervise the building of the Biltmore Estate. Lyman, a graduate of Vassar, built her “Settlement House” in the Beaverdam area of Asheville, for the purpose of providing a place for the “reviving of the weaving industry”, utilizing the weaving skills and talents of the local mountain women, to not only make their weavings available to the public, but also to give them a means of generating income. Lyman’s Settlement house was the progenitor of the craft-revival movement that led to the Allanstand Cottage Industries, Edith Vanderbilt’s Biltmore Industries and ultimately the Southern Highland Craft Guild. Richard Sharp Smith took Downing’s advice and applied the touch of the artist in designing Lyman’s “log-cabin”. Utilizing round logs, Smith essentially designed Lyman’s Settlement House as a log bungalow, with a second floor under a large sweeping truncated-side-gabled roof which covered a large front porch. Like a bungalow, the artful log cabin had a two-story side-bay and a shingled front dormer. Smith would go on to design other Adirondack Rustic-style houses in the Asheville area, such as the Connelly family lodges on the North Fork, the Calderon Carlisle lodge at Glenn Inglis, Dr. Ambler’s “Rattlesnake Lodge”

and S. R. Keesler’s “Breezinook” at Montreat, NC.

What William Durant did for the wealthy who desired a rustic escape to the wilderness in a luxury Adirondack log cabin, William S. Wicks accomplished for the middle-class and working classes with his 1889 publication of *Log Cabins: How to Build and Furnish Them*. Although William Wicks was an architect working in the Adirondacks, his book “instructed readers how to build a modest log cabin, not a sprawling Adirondack camp”.¹² William Wicks’ log cabins utilized smaller round logs and were of a smaller scale than the large log-lodge structures then being built in the “Great Camps” in the Adirondacks. These smaller-scale cabins soon became the norm for those desiring to build a log cabin, and in the ensuing decades, especially up to the 1930’s, one and two-room log cabins were replicated as hunting cabins, lake cabins, tourist camp cabins, tea rooms, and gift-shops and restaurants.

As the twentieth-century dawned, the American Arts & Crafts movement was developing. The American Arts & Crafts movement was an off-shoot of the 19th-century British Arts & Crafts movement, however, although the American Arts & Crafts movement touted the same principles of elevating and integrating the work of the designers and craftsmen, the promoters of the American Arts & Crafts Movement, such as Gustav Stickley and Elbert Hubbard sought to adapt those principles to life in America. While practitioners of the movement in America also believed that a strong connection between the artist and their work was the key to human fulfillment, they largely overlooked the socialist politics of their neighbors across the Atlantic. As a whole, American craftsmen embraced the modern technology of machines, believing that it took a marriage of design and industry to produce beautiful objects for the majority of people.¹³ “Stickley, already a veteran of the furniture business, formed Craftsman Workshops in upstate New York in 1903, bringing together a talented guild of designers, cabinet makers, and metal and leather workers. He began publishing a monthly magazine called *The Craftsman*, a how-to manual for living the Arts and Crafts style, and pledged to achieve “the union in one person of the designer and the workman.”¹⁴ Although a furniture maker, Stickley also was a promoter of the Arts & Crafts application to architecture and can be credited with popularizing the “bungalow” specifically through the “Craftsman Homes” section in his monthly Craftsman magazine, which included images, plans, and original designs by architects Greene & Greene, among others. Between 1907 and 1925, the bungalow was one of the most sought-after home designs.¹⁵

Gustav Stickley incorporated into his promotion of the Arts & Crafts movement the American “Log-cabin myth”. By 1907, he was promoting the building of log cabins as Craftsman-style bungalows. In fact, in 1908, Gustave Stickley built “a low, roomy house built of logs”,¹⁶ as the first building on his Craftsman Farms campus in upstate New York. I believe, besides adopting the log-cabin myth, Stickley was also influenced (consciously or unconsciously) by the ruggedness and Americanness of the Adirondack-Rustic style, which was nearby, and saw both the Adirondack-style and the log cabin as true American interpretations of the ideals of the Arts & Crafts Movement.

Another factor that brought a renewed interest in the log cabin during the first

three decades of the twentieth century was the rise of the “National Park”. By the Act of March 1, 1872, Congress established Yellowstone National Park in the Territories of Montana and Wyoming “as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people” and placed it “under exclusive control of the Secretary of the Interior.” On August 25, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the act creating the National Park Service, a new federal bureau in the Department of the Interior responsible for protecting the 35 national parks and monuments then managed by the department and those yet to be established.¹⁷ Included in the 1916 list of parks was the Pisgah Forest, which Edith Vanderbilt sold to the National Government in 1914, following the death of her husband George W. Vanderbilt. The Pisgah Forest had been part of Vanderbilt’s vast Biltmore Estate. The first decades of the National Park Service adopted the log cabin and Adirondack-style for their park structures, such as Old Faithful Inn in Yellowstone National Park, built in 1903-04. “Infused with native materials, natural whole logs, and built by hand (or meant to look as if it was), these buildings took on their own style, and the style became known as “Parkitecture”.¹⁸

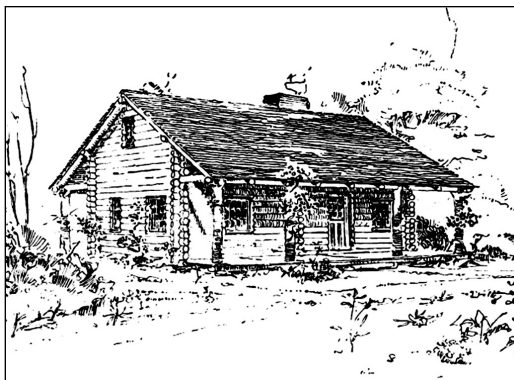
But of all the societal influences that may have led to the building of the Thomas Wolfe Cabin, the two most direct influences were no doubt, the proliferation of the automobile, and “the vacation”. “Ownership of motorcars rose from 0.5 million in 1910 to more than 8 million in 1920 to 26.5 million in 1925, and the declining cost of the automobile meant that middleclass Americans were more able to afford one.”¹⁹ Now, the rising middleclass not only had affordable places to escape to (National Parks) on their “vacations”, but with the affordable automobile, they now had a viable means of getting there and back.

By the 1920’s and 1930’s, the rise of the National Parks in conjunction with the proliferation of the automobile to the middle-class, also led to the creation of the “tourist camp”, an affordable and desirable accommodation for those who needed a temporary place of lodging on their vacation or their journey to the “wilderness”. The early tourist camps were just as their name implies, little more than a campground where “tourists” could choose a campsite to pitch a tent or park their car (to sleep in). In turn, the camp would usually provide toilet and bathing facilities, and sometimes recreational opportunities. Asheville’s first tourist camp, was a public municipal camp, established by the city in 1922 on the Old Waterworks property on the Swannanoa River, on land just below the site of the future Thomas Wolfe Cabin. In conjunction with the Asheville Tourist Camp, a recreational park and swimming pool, were soon added as additional incentives to draw tourists into the camp. In 1924, a dam was erected at the site of the former waterworks, next to the tourist camp, and a lake was formed as another added feature (the lake was called Lake Craig).²⁰ However, by 1926 the city had decided that the tourist camp was not as profitable as had been expected and so they closed the camp and turned the area into a picnic grounds and operated the entire camp as a municipal recreation park only.²¹

Alison Hoagland, author of *The Log Cabin: An American Icon*, writes that at first the municipal “tourist camps” across the U. S. were free of charge, but that “once campgrounds proved popular and began to charge fees, entrepreneurs entered the market.”²² Soon the tents at private tourist camps gave way to cabins, often laid out around an open courtyard, hence “tourist camps” soon became known as “tourist courts”. The “cabins” at tourist courts were often built of logs or simulated logs (slabs of half round timber used to simulate log construction), for as author Hoagland further tells us, “Even the name-cabin- led logically to a log cabin, the familiar domestic icon.”²³ This evolution from tourist camps to tourist courts, not only occurred across America in the 1920’s and 1930’s, but locally the evolution took the same form and had relatively the same timeline. In fact, I suspect that the 1926 closing of the Asheville Tourist Camp may have jump-started the trend in Asheville and its surrounding area, as within five years, a number of private tourist camps began sprouting up around Asheville. From 1930-1933, several private tourist camps opened up north, south, west, and east of Asheville along the major travel routes, such as the Asheville-Henderson Highway (north-south), the Asheville Black Mountain Highway (east), the Charlotte Highway (southeast), the Marshal Highway (northeast to Tennessee), the Pisgah Highway (southwest), and the Smoky Park Highway (west). A 1932 newspaper article in the Asheville Citizen-Times reporting about rise of the local tourist camps, reported that there were then “around a dozen such camps in the immediate vicinity of Asheville”.²⁴ Four of the dozen tourist camps mentioned, were not only among those closest to Asheville, but they also had the distinction of using log cabins for their buildings.

The first two of the four camps to

continued on the next page



Top: Perhaps the earliest example of the Adirondack Rustic style, in Asheville, was Susan Chester Lyman’s 1894 “Log-cabin Settlement House”, designed by architect Richard Sharp Smith.

Left: This modest log cabin, which looks suspiciously like a William Wicks cabin, was published by Gustav Stickley in *The Craftsman* in August 1911.

Right: This modest log cabin with simple porches and small round logs was illustrated in the 1889 publication of *Log Cabins: How to Build and Furnish Them*, by William S. Wicks.

Wolfe Cabin *continued*

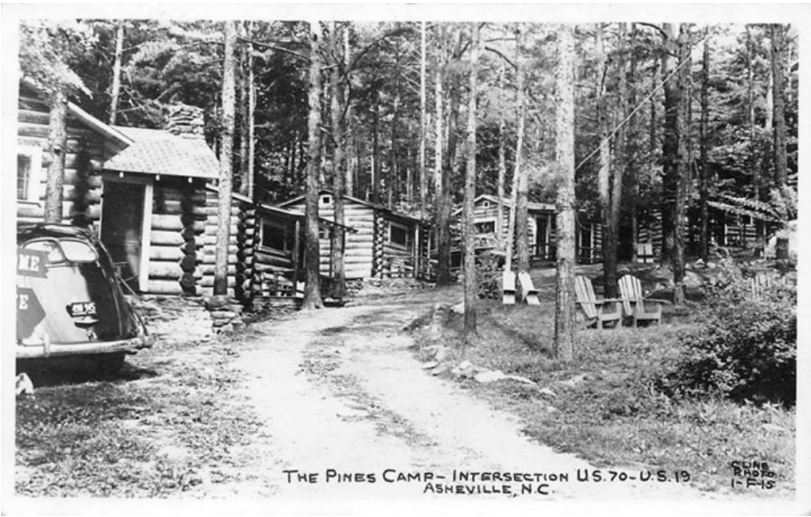


This photograph of Thomas Wolfe writing at a table in the Whitson cabin appeared in the July 11, 1937 edition of the Asheville Citizen-Times newspaper titled, “Wolfe At Work In Mountain Cabin”. We see in the photo that there was a window on the west side of the living room, where is now the entrance to a bedroom that was later created by enclosing the sleeping porch. We also see the original log walls, which have since been covered in knotty-pine paneling.

open were “Foster’s Log Cabin Court” (330 *Weaverville Rd.*), and “The Pines” (346 *Weaverville Rd.*). Located adjacent to each other, north of Asheville on the Weaverville Highway, both were opened in 1931.²⁵ Zebulon H. and Audrey Foster, both Buncombe County natives, purchased two lots in Pine Burr Park in 1920.²⁶ Zebulon Foster (1881-1941) worked in the cleaning business in Asheville when he met Audrey Smith (1894-1978), a nurse at St. Joseph’s Hospital and Royce Cottage Sanitarium. Residing in the Montford neighborhood at the time, the couple bought the property, approximately five miles north of Asheville on the Weaverville Highway because of their desire to return to a more rural setting. The Weaverville Highway which was part of the former Dixie Highway which connected the Midwest with Florida. The heavily traveled highway provided a steady stream of potential guests, who had few other options for overnight accommodations on this section of road. At some point in the late 1920s, a passing traveler asked to stop for the night and camp under the pines. The visitor’s compliments about the beauty and comfort of the site planted the idea with the Fosters that the property could become a regular tourist camp. Around 1931, the Fosters hired Bill Parker of Reems Creek to build the first set of seven cottages with little porches. Arranged in a line, the one-room cabins were constructed of pine logs. After the success of the first season, the Fosters erected six more one-room cabins that formed a second line. Around 1932, Zeb Foster sold his cleaning business in Asheville to assist with managing the tourist court, which they called Foster’s Log Cabin Court. During the mid-1930s, the Fosters added a few more cabins, including several larger units, a laundry, a public bath house to replace the outhouses, and the dining lodge, which was completed in 1937.²⁷ All these cabins, including the dining lodge were built using small “pole-logs” with corner saddle-notches, and chinking in between the logs. This use of smaller diameter pole-logs with pronounced chinking would become the standard type of log cabin being built in this area during the 1920’s through the 1940’s.

Immediately to the north (adjacent to) of Foster’s Log Cabin Court, “The Pines” was built by and operated by William W. and Ida Pruett. In 1922, the Pruett’s bought “lot 29-1/2” in Pine Burr Park from Marian A. Putnam.²⁸ At the time William Pruett had just began working for Louis Carr Lumber Company, near Brevard. Soon

after purchasing the property, the Pruett’s built a five-room “log bungalow” on their new lot.²⁹ By 1924, the Pruett’s were spending more time in Brevard, and so Ida began advertising their Pine Burr Park “log bungalow” for rent: “*LOG BUNGALOW on Weaverville Road. 5 rooms and bath. Completely furnished. City water and lights. Reasonable rent. No sick. Mrs. W. W. Pruett, Pisgah Forest.*”³⁰ The Pruett’s “log bungalow” was just that, a one-story log cabin built in the bungalow style with small pole-logs and chinking. The Pruett’s continued advertising the bungalow for rent on into 1930. But by 1933, they had decided to expand their rental options, by building



several small log cabins on the adjacent lot to the south, which they had purchased in 1925.³¹ No doubt they got their idea from the Foster’s Log Cabin Camp, next door, which had opened in 1931. The log cabins that the Pruett’s built were small one-room cabins with a small porch overhang at each entrance door. Ida Pruett named their new tourist camp, “The Pines Cabins”.

Shortly after the opening of the Beaucatcher Tunnel in 1929, Wallace Wright, whose family homestead just happened to adjoin the new Highway 20 (Tunnel Road) just after it emerged from the eastside of the Tunnel, decided to open his own tourist camp. Using the wooded site’s natural mineral springs as a draw, Wright constructed ten log cabins surrounding the spring, and in 1932 opened as “The Asheville Mineral Springs Cabins”. The cabins were typical tourist camp cabins, built with small pole-logs with chinking in between the logs. A 1939 newspaper photo shows that the cabins also had porches with log posts and rails. The Asheville Mineral Springs Cabins were operated by the Wrights until 1964, at which time the property was sold to developer Perry Alexander as the site of the Tunnel Road Shopping Center (Innsbruck Mall).

The fourth closest tourist camp to be established near the Thomas Wolfe Cabin was “Homeland Park.” In 1932, developer

Eugene G. Hester and his second wife, Elizabeth B. Hester, along with their business partner Hubert C. Jarvis formed Homeland Park, Inc. Hester was a seasoned developer having been the co-developer (with Jake Childs) of the second Kenilworth Inn and the surrounding Kenilworth Park subdivision, beginning around 1913. Hester and Jarvis had a full-service vision of capitalizing on Asheville’s burgeoning tourist industry, as their corporation’s purpose was not only to build, buy, sell, or lease real estate, but also to “manufacture, buy, and sell furniture and fixtures”, “to buy, sell, trade and deal in, wholesale and retail groceries, provisions...general merchandise”, and “to

make and sell novelties made of wood, leather, cloth, wire, and other metals”.³² Homeland Park delivered on these services by not only providing lodging but also providing dining facilities, gift shop, and general merchandise, as well as providing recreational facilities. But the primary draw to Homeland Park was its 30 log cabins, which in 1935 expanded to over 60 log cabins, all equipped “with showers, tubs and toilets”.³³ These simple pole-log cabins all had a front or back porch and ranged from one to three rooms. Although some had

front gables, most had side-gabled roofs with a low-slope shed roof over the porches.

Into this frenzy of log-cabin building during the 1920’s and 1930’s came local cartoonist Max Whitson (Edward Maxwell Whitson). Max’s great-great grandfather,

William Whitson, was one of the earliest settlers of Buncombe County, settling on 400 acres along “Rosses Creek” in 1795³⁴. William Whitson, in 1806 decided to move west to take up grants in Maury County, TN, so he sold his farm (all of what is now S. Tunnel Road) to a new settler, James Patton! Unfortunately, William died en-route to Tennessee. Only one son, Joseph Whitson, remained in Buncombe County. In 1814, Joseph purchased a 180-acre farm from Col. John Patton, on both sides of the Swannanoa River at the “Big Bend”.³⁵ Joseph Whitson either built or moved into a log cabin on the property, and he would also establish a grist mill and saw mill as well. In 1854, Joseph sold 25 acres of his property, including the Grist Mill at the “big bend” to the Buncombe Manufacturing Company. This piece of the Whitson property would later be sold to Monroville Patton and known as “Patton’s Mill”. This mill was purchased in 1886 by the City and a dam and pump house were erected (this was later known as “The Old Waterworks”)-the water from there was pumped over Beaucatcher to a standpipe reservoir. It was on this property that the city, in 1922, opened the Asheville Tourist Camp/ Recreation Park.

The remainder of the Joseph Whitson property (east and south of the “Big Bend”) including the family’s log home descended to his son, Dr. George W. Whitson. In his retirement years, around the turn of the twentieth-century, Dr. Whitson built a “modern” two-story house to replace the original Joseph Whitson log-house.³⁶ The house and property, which remains at 1010 Oteen Church Road, was after Dr. Whitson’s death in 1906 and his wife’s death in 1920, continued to be occupied by Dr. Whitson’s four unmarried children; son Henry, and daughters, Sallie, Jennie, Mary and Hattie. This remaining Whitson land, in the 1920’s, was mostly on the hill above Azalea Road east of the Tourist Camp/ Recreation Park.

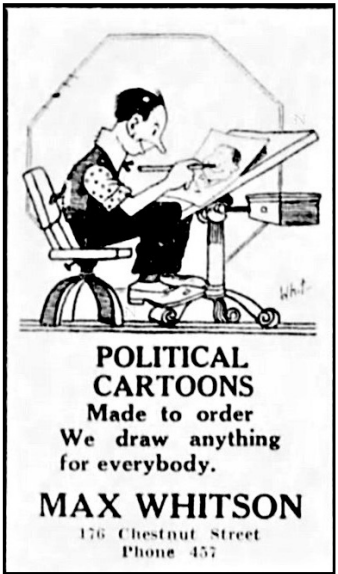
It was on this Whitson land (occupied by his aunts & uncles) that Max Whitson chose to build his retreat cabin in 1930. Max was then 35 years old, unmarried, and living in his boyhood home at 176 E. Chestnut Street in downtown Asheville, with his mother, sister Maude, and his uncle James Keith (his mother’s brother).³⁷ I have seen references saying that Max built his log cabin in 1924 or 1925, however I suspect that it was not built until after 1930, which is when the estate of George W. Whitson was finally settled by court appointed commissioners who divided the property and assigned each division to one or multiple heirs. The cabin was built on “Tract #6 of

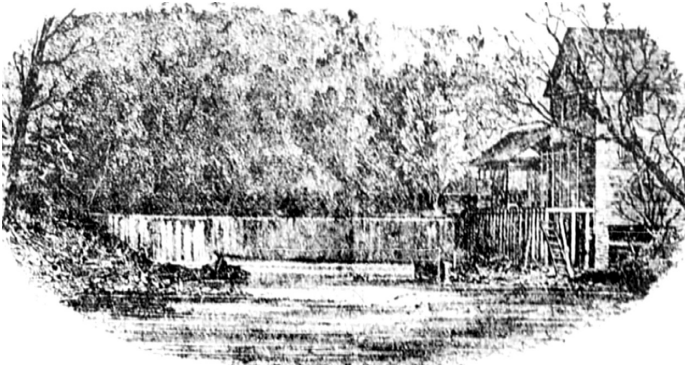


Above: This 1939 newspaper photo shows the Powell family of Kannapolis enjoying a game of croquet at the Asheville Mineral Springs Cabins. Notice the log cabin in the background with it’s log porch posts and rails.

Right: Old Faithful Inn in Yellowstone National Park, built in 1903-04, combined the Adirondack Rustic Style with the Log-Cabin Revival style. This combination style, which has now been been nicknamed “Parkitecture”, was symbolic of the Adirondack resorts of the rich and famous, while also evoking the pioneer logs cabins of the early western settlers.

Far Right: Newspaper advertisement from Max Whitson, the owner of the “Thomas Wolfe Cabin”.





Clockwise from Top Left: This circa 1915 Model T five-passenger touring car was outfitted with a lean-to tent, the perfect solution for stopping overnight at an Automobile Tourist Camp.

The 60 log cabins at Homeland Park were simple pole-log cabins, and all had a front or back porch and ranged from one-three rooms. Although some of the cabins had front gables, most had side-gabled roofs with a low-slope shed roof over the porches, like these shown in the vintage Homelaaand Park postcard.

This color photo from 1963 shows the E. Max Whitson cabin, looking from the southwest. The sleeping porch with its ribbon of casement windows shows on the left, and the tree house, “up in a big Oak”, shows on the right in front of the cabin.

Published in a 1932 article, titled “Know Your Community”, this is a sketch of the old Montraville Patton Mill and dam, which was purchased in 1886 by the City. A new dam and pump house were erected on this site (known as “The Old Waterworks”). This mill replaced the former Joseph Whitson Grist Mill which sat on the same site at the “big bend” of the Swannanoa River. The current city dam and pumping station at the Recreation Park sits in the same location.

Tract #3”, a 9 acre tract that was assigned to Max; to Max’s mother Ida Whitson (his father had passed away in 1929); his brother William K. Whitson; and his sister Maude Whitson.³⁸ The lot assignments were allotted “according to their respective rights and interests” and “allotted jointly as prayed for by certain of the petitioners”, so in that respect it is possible that the cabin could have been on the tract prior to its assignment. However, the first mention of the cabin in the newspapers was not until 1932, when it was reported: “*WHEN MAX WHITSON gets tired of drawing funny folks he shuts up shop and goes out to his “garden of eat’in” in the big woods above Lake Craig. Cedar Cliff cabin is his sanctuary.*”³⁹ The article goes on to describe the cabin: “*It is completely equipped with everything that makes for peace and comfort, from living room to shower bath and is hid away in the heart of the wilderness where no one ever intrudes.*”⁴⁰ Other features of the cabin, as reported, included a Gold Fish pond, a “30-foot swing” which “sways invitingly between two trees,” and a tree house “up in a big Oak”. The writer describes the tree house as a “*furnished bungalow with a front porch which is reached by a sort of ship’s companionway with handrails-very steep*”.⁴¹

Architecturally, Max Whitson’s cabin was built of small pole-logs with chinking in between the logs. Very like the cabins then being built in the surrounding tourist camps, the cabin was one story, with a side-gabled main roof and low-pitched shed roof over the rear kitchen and bath and another low-pitched shed roof over a front porch (which extended across the front of the cabin). The cabin had three rooms in its main section, a large living room, a small kitchen and a full bath. A “sleeping porch” with low log walls with screened windows above was built on the west side of cabin. The scale and size of the Whitson cabin is like those built on the other side of the hill at Homeland Park, although the Whitson cabin does predate the Homeland Park cabins by at least two years.

During the 1930’s Max Whitson and his siblings used their cabin both as a retreat as well as a place for entertaining, and for club meetings (such as the Asheville Exchange Club and the DeMolays-a leadership youth club). On June 19, 1935, it was reported that the members of the Asheville Exchange Club and their wives, held a picnic “*at the cabin of Dr. W. K. Whitson, near Azalea*”.⁴² I suspect that although the siblings jointly owned the tract and jointly used the cabin, that Max Whitson was the builder of the cabin, as in that same month, June of 1935, the siblings sold their “two-thirds undivided” interest in the 9 acre tract to Max Whitson, giving him sole ownership of the cabin.

Max Whitson and his small cabin would have fallen into obscurity, had it not been for the Summer of 1947. Hometown author, Thomas Wolfe, whose father was Asheville’s “Monument” gravestone carver and supplier, and whose mother was the proprietor of the “Old Kentucky Home” boarding house on Spruce Street, decided to return home to Asheville in 1937. Thomas Wolfe had not been home since the 1929 publication of his novel, Look Homeward Angel, a story of a fictionalized mountain town called “Altamont” whose characters (good and bad) were obviously based on Wolfe’s Asheville family and residents. In fact, the descriptions and names of the novel’s characters were so thinly disguised that hometown animosity rose against Wolfe and was so strong that he feared returning home to an angry mob! But by 1937, the hometown animosity had waned, and had been mostly replaced

with pride for the hometown boy who had made the bigtime! A famous New York City writer! Wolfe arrived in Asheville in May of 1937, but alas decided to only stay for a few days, before returning to New York City. However, he felt so welcomed that he decided to return to Asheville for the summer, and so before returning to New York (to wrap up some business) he sought out Max Whitson, a former classmate (from the North State Fitting School). “*Tom heard I had a small cabin up near the Recreation park and wanted to rent it for the summer*”, recalled Whitson in 1971.⁴³ Max took him up to see the cabin, and Wolfe was so pleased with it that he immediately wrote a check for the first month’s rent.⁴⁴ Wolfe returned to New York, where he later received a letter in June from Max Whitson informing him that Whitson had “*put the cabin in good shape, waxed the floors, fixed up the road that leads to the place, and has put in some new furniture, and that everything is now comfortable and ready!*”⁴⁵

Wolfe arrived in Asheville on July 1, 1937. He called Max from the Biltmore Station and told him that he had arrived and that he would get a taxi out to the cabin and meet him there. As Wolfe did not drive or cook, Max Whitson became his chauffeur for the summer, and a handyman named Ed, was hired to cook and keep house. Four days after he arrived Wolfe hired the first of a series of stenographers, as he intended to keep working throughout the summer.⁴⁶ But word soon got out that he was back in town. In fact, just two days after his arrival, on July 4th, his presence was revealed in the Asheville Citizen-Times. “Tom Wolfe To Spend The Summer Writing At A Cabin Near Here”, was the title of the article that all but named the exact location of the “*mountain cabin a short distance east of Asheville*”.⁴⁷ Then on July 10th, little over a week after Wolfe had arrived, an Asheville Citizen-Times photographer “paid a visit”. The following day, a photograph of Wolfe writing at a table in the cabin appeared in the newspaper titled, “Wolfe At Work In Mountain Cabin”.⁴⁸ Of course, Wolfe must have welcomed the notoriety as he allowed the article to be written and photos to be taken and published. For an architectural historian like me, these photographs are a treasure trove of information. It is from these photographs that we have evidence of the original construction and layout of the cabin, which will be important if the cabin were to be restored. Sometime after 1937, the interior of the cabin was sheathed in knotty-pine paneling and the sleeping porch was enclosed and poorly constructed additions had been added. For instance, we see in the 1937 photo of Wolfe writing at the cabin table, that there was a window on the west side of the living room, where is now the entrance to a bedroom that was created by enclosing the sleeping porch. At first this made be think that the sleeping had been added since Wolfe’s stay. However, literary references, such as Whitson’s 1971 article, told of Wolfe spending time on the sleeping porch while he was there. I’ve recently found photographic evidence that the sleeping porch was indeed part of the cabin during Wolfe’s stay. One of the many visitors that came to call was Judge Phillip C. Cocke, who came calling on July 29th, along with a lady friend. Wolfe had used some of Judge Cocke’s traits for the character of “Judge Rumford Bland” in Look Homeward Angel. After his visit, the Judge requested some photos of himself and his lady friend with Wolfe, be taken outside the cabin. One of those photos clearly shows the sleeping porch with its ribbon windows, and it even shows the interior curtains.

Despite the many intrusions and unex-



pected visitors who would just show up at the cabin door, Wolfe did manage get some substantial work accomplished, including the final draft of “A Party At Jack’s”, which would be posthumously published in *Scribner’s Magazine*, in 1939. However, Wolfe’s stay at the cabin was short lived. During his May visit, Wolfe had first stopped in Yancey County to visit with his mother’s relatives, including his great-uncle, John Baird Westall, a 95 year-old Civil War veteran, whose stories Wolfe would use in a subsequent story called, “Chickamauga”. On May 1, just as he was coming out of a soda shop on Main Street in Burnsville, NC, Thomas Wolfe witnessed a shooting. Although no one was killed in the incident, a few days later another shooting incident involving the same men resulted in a death. While staying at the cabin, Wolfe was served with a subpoena to appear as the state’s witness of the earlier incident. Wolfe attended the trial from August 16 through the 18th. According to Max Whitson, Wolfe never returned to the cabin to live after the trial, instead “he took a room at the Battery Park [Hotel] in Asheville”.⁴⁹ Although Wolfe did return to the cabin one more time before he left, for a grand party, overall his stay at the Whitson cabin lasted only about six weeks. But because of Wolfe’s untimely death the following year, 1938, the cabin took on an immortality as representing Wolfe’s final visit home to his beloved “Altamont”.

Years later, as interest in Wolfe was waning, and Max Whitson was approaching retirement, Whitson sold the cabin in 1956 to Joe and June Hodges.⁵⁰ In 1960, the Hodges sold the cabin to John W. Moyer,⁵¹ who had also purchased the adjacent Whitson Homestead from Sallie and Jennie Whitson.⁵² Around 1972, the Moyer’s divorced and shortly thereafter sold the Whitson house. However, Moyer retained the Wolfe cabin and its 9 acre property. Around 1977, Moyer and his second wife Vallie built a new D-log cabin adjacent to the Wolfe Cabin as their primary residence. In 1983, the City of Asheville passed an ordinance designating “The Thomas Wolfe Cabin” at 1200 Oteen Church Road as “Historic Property”, placing it under the purview of the city/county’s 1979 established “Historic Resources Commission”. In 1999, Moyer decided to sell the property, with both cabins, and offered it first to the city. After numerous revisions of options to purchase, the sale of the Thomas Wolfe Cabin to the City of Asheville was completed on May 3, 2001.⁵³

Unfortunately, the city had little interest or manpower to maintain “The Thomas Wolfe Cabin” after it’s purchase in 2001. Discovering the lack of maintenance and advanced deterioration of the cabin, in 2012, the Preservation Society of Asheville & Buncombe County stepped in for an intervention. In May of 2012- the PSABC signed an agreement with the City of Asheville to undertake an extensive study of the Thomas Wolfe Cabin, which included: a Building Assessment outlining the prioritized needs for the property and a Feasibility Study to identify sympathetic future uses of the site. On May 31, 2012- Members of the PSABC met onsite to tour the property, to perform an initial assessment of the site conditions and to discuss the projected goals of the project. At that gathering PSABC displayed their support for the National Trust Campaign “This Place Matters”, through a group photo holding the “This Place Matters” banner in front of the Wolfe cabin. In

2013-2014- PSABC solicited and received a donation of EPDM roofing to install over the Thomas Wolfe cabin roof temporarily to stabilize the structure, until restoration begins, and in addition PSABC prepared selective demolition drawings, and helped the City to expedite a “Selective Demolition” application to the Historic Resources Commission, to remove later “non-contributing” additions on the cabin. These additions were in greater decay than much of the original cabin materials. In 2016, the City, in conjunction with PSABC project manager Craig Cline, followed through and performed the “Selective Demolition” as well as taking other simple stabilization measures, such as improving the air flow around and under the foundation and installing fans and a dehumidifier to slow organic decomposition of the wood structure.

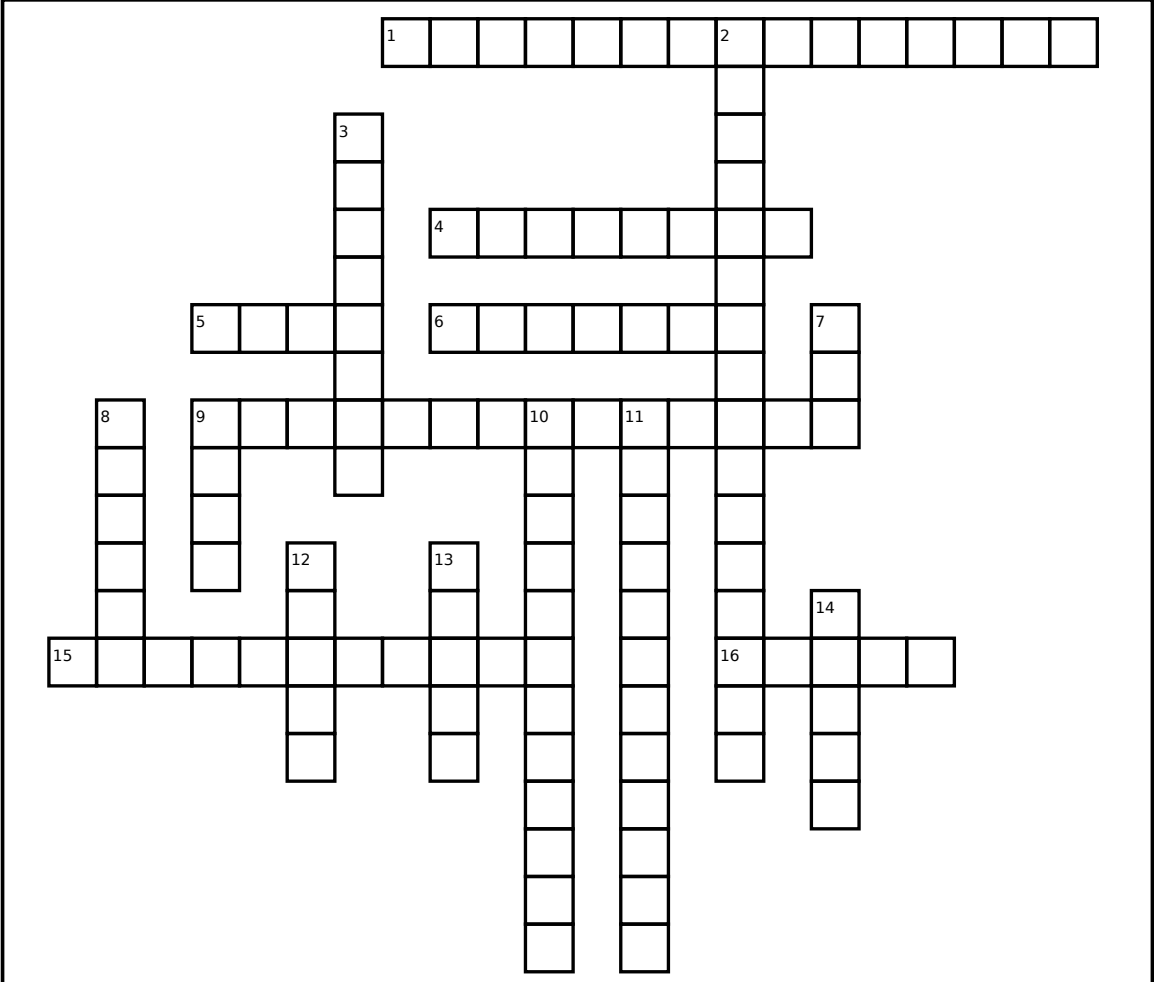
In July of 2018, the City of Asheville issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for Master Planning and Professional Design Services for the Thomas Wolfe Cabin at Azalea Park. A planning team led by preservation on architects Lord Aeck Sargent was selected, and work was authorized to begin in January, 2019. The goal of the project was to update and further develop the work previously completed by the City of Asheville and the

In 1983, the City of Asheville passed an ordinance designating “The Thomas Wolfe Cabin” at 1200 Oteen Church Road as “Historic Property”, placing it under the purview of the city/county’s 1979 established “Historic Resources Commission”.

Preservation on Society of Asheville & Buncombe County by providing a “comprehensive, multi- disciplinary master plan” for the Thomas Wolfe Cabin and its nearly 43-acre site. A Master Plan and Report were prepared and presented to the City in the Spring of 2020. The proposal presented by Lord Aeck Sargent was for a \$9 million-dollar, three-phased, combination tourists and writer’s retreat. The plan called for restoration of the Cabin and rebuilding of the 1930’s treehouse, as well as the addition of new lodging cabins, a large-group lodge structure, and landscape enhancements with improved vehicular pathways and well as new trails and pedestrian paths. Since 2020, social events and a change of leadership at the city has resulted in a de-prioritizing of The Thomas Wolfe Cabin project. The Preservation Society of Asheville & Buncombe County has recently re-activated their advocacy for the preservation of the cabin and have formed a committee to take another look at the project and see if there are alternative ways of re-activating the preservation and use plans for the cabin

Although the Thomas Wolfe Cabin is historically significant for its 1937 associations with famed hometown author Thomas Wolfe, I propose that it is also historically significant as a remaining specimen of the Log Cabin Revival which swept through the US during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Like many of his fellow-Americans during that period, Max Whitson, built his own rustic log cabin get-away where he could retreat to his own piece of “wilderness”. ☞

VISIT PSABC.ORG
FOR CREDITS
& ENDNOTES



- Down:
- 2. 469 mile scenic drive
 - 3. Inn built in 1898 on Charlotte Street
 - 7. Creative neighborhood along the French Broad River
 - 8. Asheville's beloved brick mason
 - 9. Golf course in East Asheville on the National Register of Historic Places
 - 10. Adaptive re-use of the TIMES
 - 11. Douglas Ellington church
 - 12. Formed in 1976 to conserve Asheville and Buncombe County's heritage and sense of place through preservation and promotion of the region's historic resources
 - 13. Grammy award winning singer born in AVL in 1937
 - 14. The great ____ of 1916
- Across:
- 1. WNC's first skyscraper
 - 4. Many Victorian style homes in this Local Historic District
 - 5. Formerly known as Buncombe County Junior College and Asheville-Biltmore College
 - 6. Landscape architect for Biltmore Estate
 - 9. "Bull Durham" movie setting
 - 15. One of America's first indoor shopping malls
 - 16. Lived in the "Old Kentucky Home" in downtown Asheville



FLATIRON PERMANENTLY PROTECTED

We are proud to announce the donation of a preservation easement on the Flatiron Building!

This generous donation will mean the permanent protection of this downtown landmark. In the state of North Carolina, the donation of preservation easement is the only way to permanently protect a place. Completed in 1927, the Flatiron was designed by architect Albert Wirth as part of E.W. Grove's redevelopment of the Battery Park area. "In 1927, Asheville's first radio station came into existence as WWNC (Wonderful Western North Carolina), broadcasting from the Flatiron Building. It claimed to be the highest broadcasting station in eastern America at an altitude of 2,496 feet. The next year, WWNC was bought by the Asheville Citizen, and several years later the studios and offices were moved to the newspaper's new building on O. Henry Avenue."

'Asheville Mountain Majesty' by Lou Harshaw. Illustration: Lee James Pantas, 1992

"Follow the Trend of Trade"

Asheville's New Business Area

In a few days the pavement now being laid alongside the Bon Marche Department store will be completed, thus opening the new business street.

BATTERY PARK AVENUE

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Answers

1. Jackson Building
2. Blue Ridge Parkway
3. The Manor
4. Miller
5. RAD
6. Citizen Vinyl
7. First Baptist
8. Flood
9. PSABC
10. Flood
11. Flood
12. Flood
13. Flood
14. Flood
15. Flood
16. Flood

Across

1. Jackson Building
2. Blue Ridge Parkway
3. The Manor
4. Miller
5. RAD
6. Citizen Vinyl
7. First Baptist
8. Flood
9. PSABC
10. Flood
11. Flood
12. Flood
13. Flood
14. Flood
15. Flood
16. Flood

Down

1. Jackson Building
2. Blue Ridge Parkway
3. The Manor
4. Miller
5. RAD
6. Citizen Vinyl
7. First Baptist
8. Flood
9. PSABC
10. Flood
11. Flood
12. Flood
13. Flood
14. Flood
15. Flood
16. Flood

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These older homes are tricky. You never know what kind of pipes you'll find."

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